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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: ELECTIONS COMMISSION APPEALS FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

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¶1. Heads of diplomatic missions convened at the United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peacebuilding (UNTOP) for the international donor community's monthly meeting on electoral issues May 17. Mirzoali Boltuyev, Chairman of the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER), presented a chart outlining concrete actions the CCER proposes to take in order to improve upon the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) criticism of the 2005 parliamentary elections.

¶2. Boltuyev made clear to international donors the government of Tajikistan would like to hold a transparent election, fully compliant with Tajik law and international standards. However, the technical assistance required to bring the election up to that level means Tajikistan would require international donor support. The CCER and Center for Strategic Research (CRS) together with IFES formed a working group to tackle election reform. The group took each one of the OSCE's criticism mentioned in their 2005 parliamentary report and suggested concrete actions to remedy the problem. The chart, based on the OSCE report for the 2005 parliamentary elections, is a work in progress and modifications may be needed because presidential election procedures are different. Participants encouraged the CCER to share the chart with political parties for their input and buy-in to the process, noting that their involvement would boost the election's validity.

¶3. The chart suggests wide-ranging changes, not all of which would require financial assistance. Some recommended actions include targeted voter education programs for women and young adults and preparing reference manuals for local government officials explaining their legal obligations and restrictions, designed to reduce local government interference. The chart

also lists amendments to laws clearly defining local officials' roles and implementing fines if officials overstep their authorities. Procedural changes such as securing ballots are also included in the chart. Technical assistance, such as procuring indelible ink and pens, is required. The media will be invited to key events such as ballot printings to ensure transparency, and the CCER hopes to receive funding to organize television debates and issue media spots to publicize election rules and activities.

¶4. The Tajik government plans to host a two-day conference in July to discuss the constitution and presidential election law, criteria for permitting observers and assessment missions as well as how to improve voters' rights and the CCER's role in the election. Parliament will officially announce the November presidential election in August. It is then the CCER will establish 68 district election committees and 3,000 precinct committees.

¶5. NOTE: Patrick Bradley from the United Nations Elections Needs Assessment Mission was also present at the meeting. Foreign Minister Nazarov wrote a letter to the UN's Secretary General requesting a Needs Assessment Mission. Unfortunately Bradley could not share his report to the Secretary General, because most of it will be confidential and used to determine UN assistance for the November presidential election. END NOTE.

¶6. COMMENT: All of this is the result of the work IFES has been doing since the beginning of the year with the CCER and the President's Strategic Research Center. It is especially heartening that Boltuyev has gone public with the international donor community. We are grateful for DRL's extraordinary election-year grant to accomplish this work. We will work with IFES to analyze the charts to see what really needs to be funded, and may propose a demarche to donor capitals. The international community that cares about democracy has a chance to help Tajikistan do something right. When Dushanbe appears

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increasingly committed to taking significant steps forward in the conduct of the November presidential election, we cannot afford to let them down. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND